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CHILD-HEADED HOMES ON THE RISE

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As the country marked the start of Child Protection Week on Sunday, social development MEC Sisi Ntombela said yesterday the Free State was facing an increasing number of child-headed families, with children dropping out of school to take care of their siblings.

The Child Protection Week campaign started on Sunday and will end next Sunday. This year's theme is "Working Together to Protect Children".

President Jacob Zuma kickstarted the campaign in Kimberley. Minister of Social Development Bathabile Dlamini is expected to be in QwaQwa at the weekend when the campaign draws to an official close. Dlamini is expected to highlight the need to protect children within families.

Ntombela said the number of children who had to drop out of school and raise their siblings was "a concern". She said some of them end up on the streets to try and fend for themselves. Most of these children had lost their parents to HIV-Aids.

"At least 90% of child-headed cases are as a result of the children losing their parents to HIV-Aids. We find that sometimes the children themselves do not have documentation such as birth certificates. We try our best to place them in foster care and also remove some of them from the streets."

She said her department would visit Tweeling on Friday to meet children from child-headed homes and donate food, clothes and blankets. A new crèche will also be opened on the day.

Ntombela said: "Tweeling has an impoverished society. Shacks are being used as crèches for children and we thought they needed a proper one. A shack is extremely cold in winter and very hot in summer and it is not conducive for healthy children."

She said there was a significant decrease in the number of cases regarding the abuse and murdering of children compared to last year.

"Cases of rape and murder of young children are still being reported, but so far we realised that they were less compared to last year.

"The brutal murder of children, most of whom had gone missing and turned up dead, was too high last year. Instead, it seems cases regarding the murder of women are on the rise," she said.

[Source: www.thenewage.co.za]